

BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT

Mass Transit's New Look

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In an age when public transportation is being revitalized throughout the nation, the advent of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) seems perfectly timed. But it was not mere coincidence that brought BART into being during this new period of mass transit consciousness.

As the first all new regional rail transit system to be built in the United States in over 60 years, BART is the result of some far-sighted thinking stretching back almost a quarter of a century.

Following the post war building boom in the bay area there was growing local concern for the then developing problem of traffic congestion in key corridors as well as the future of regional mobility. As a result of this concern the California State Legislature, back in July of 1951, created a nine-county San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission to study regional transit problems with an eye to long range transit planning.

Creation of Rail System

After several years of work on the study, the commission presented its report to the legislature. The report recommended that a bay area rapid transit district be created to build and operate a regional rail rapid transit system. And, that this new system act as a trunk line for a total bay area transportation

concept. The plan, if adopted, would eventually include many other forms of transportation interfacing with the new system but indicated that further studies would be needed. A major objective of any plan, the report pointed out, would be orderly urbanization and economic expansion of the region while at the same time minimizing the need for additional freeways.

On June 4, 1957, not long after receiving the Transit Commission's final report, the legislature created a special five-county BART District which included Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo Counties. The BART Act, which came under Public Utilities Code Section 28500, set up a 16 member policy-making board with representatives to be appointed from each of the five member counties on a population basis. Under the existing rules this allowed Alameda and San Francisco counties four representatives, Contra Costa and San Mateo Counties three representatives, and Marin County two representatives. The appointments were split up between the board of supervisors, and the city selection committees in each of the member counties. Board members would serve a four year term and be paid \$50 per meeting up to a maximum of \$250 per month.

The BART Board of Directors would be

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charged with setting District policy; hiring the general manager, general counsel, treasurer, controller; and the District secretary, and authorizing the expenditure of funds. Preliminary to a referendum, the fledgling District was given certain taxing powers to cover administration costs and pay for needed engineering and financial studies. Such taxes would come from property owners in the member counties with a ceiling of 5¢ per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Locally Financed

The District's immediate task was to develop a comprehensive plan for a rapid transit system complete with price tag for the basic construction. BART, as it happened, would be the largest locally financed public works project in the nation's history.

In 1959 the legislature passed a special bill to make money available to the District for construction of the transbay tube, the key link for the future system, from State Toll Bridge Authority bonds. However, the bill stipulated that such funds would only be available if BART was able to raise at least \$500,000,000 or more locally for financing. Except for those who strongly believed in, or were directly connected with the project, there was little optimism that this could be achieved. It was already beginning to look like Marin and San Mateo Counties might eventually withdraw, and there was growing opposition to the project from some factions of the community.

Meanwhile the skeleton District staff and its consultants continued to work on the final plan which would be presented to the voters for approval in a referendum scheduled for the November 1962 ballot. A major portion of the work included, at the request of the District, participation in the planning, by each affected city and county. Such partnership in the planning process was considered important if the needs of the individual communities were to be met.

In order to give the project a fighting chance at the ballot box, the legislature amended the District Act to require 60 percent voter approval rather than the usual two-thirds ratio. Then, in December 1961 San Mateo supervisors voted to withdraw the county from the District. Following this, in early 1962, Marin County reluctantly withdrew after it was determined by Golden Gate Bridge District consultants that carrying trains across the Golden Gate Bridge was unfeasible. Now, with three counties making up the core District, the BART Board of Directors was reduced from 16 to 11 members. It was not until 1965 that the law on population requirements was changed which allowed for an additional rep-

resentative from Contra Costa County to be added to the BART Board.

Revision in Plans

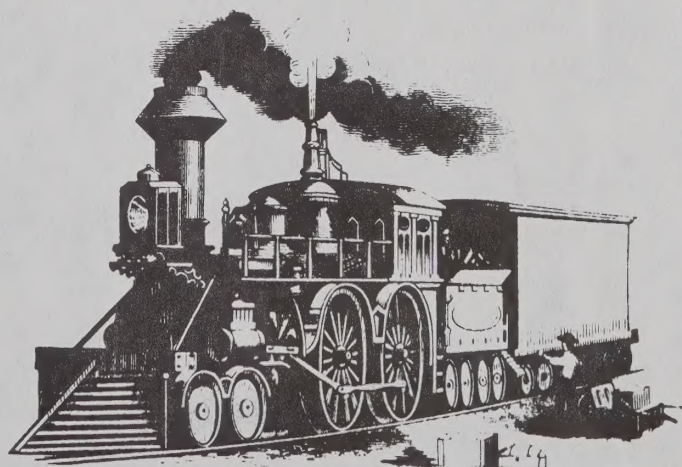
Now the District was primarily concerned with revising its initial five-county plan and concentrating on traffic between East Bay suburbs and city centers and San Francisco. The final three-county plan, called the Composite Report, was approved by the three Boards of Supervisors in July of 1962. In November, 1962, the voters of the three counties approved a \$792 million general obligation bond issue for construction of the 75-mile project. Averaged out between the three counties, the proposition squeaked through with a little over 61 percent of the voters approving.

Following the referendum a taxpayers suit was filed in Contra Costa County challenging the validity of the election. In June of 1963, Contra Costa County Superior Court ruled in favor of the District, but the result was a seven month delay in completing the first phase of detail design work, and ultimately some delay in the start of construction.

Changed Board

Recently the structure of the BART Board of Directors was changed, by voter referendum, from an appointed board to an elected board, and reduced to nine members representing nine election districts. The new Board was elected on November 5, 1974, and officially took office on November 29.

Today, nearly 13 years after the Districts' enabling legislation, the basic system is complete and sleek BART trains are carrying passengers to and from 14 communities in the three member counties. Though much remains to be done in terms of operational tuning, and looking to the possibility of future extensions, BART has surely arrived on the scene at a most propitious time in the history of the Bay Area.



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